UNITED
NATIONS

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Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1997/167
27 February 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

LETTER DATED 25 FEBRUARY 1997 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

In accordance with my obligation to bring to your attention matters that may be of interest to the members of the Security Council, and in view of the ongoing role which the United Nations continues to play in efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Liberia, I have the honour to inform you of the outcome of the second Ministerial Meeting of the ad hoc Special Conference to Support the Peace Process in Liberia, held in New York on 20 February 1997.

The meeting was organized at the request of the United States of America on behalf of the International Contact Group on Liberia, of Nigeria on behalf of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and of the Netherlands. It brought together the members of the International Contact Group, those of ECOWAS, the Bretton Woods institutions and relevant United Nations departments, programmes and agencies.

The purpose of the meeting was to build upon the momentum generated by the positive outcome of the disarmament process in Liberia, while identifying and addressing the immediate needs of the peace process and critical requirements seen for the medium term. In my opening statement to the meeting, I noted that in the past three months the Liberian peace process had witnessed important positive developments but despite those positive developments difficult challenges still remained, and it was necessary to intensify rather than relax efforts.

Three challenges would have to be met. First, it was necessary to have the political will to do what needed to be done in Liberia. Second, it was necessary for the various actors, both national and international, to have the courage to cooperate to get the job done. Third, it was necessary to find and contribute the resources needed to accomplish the job successfully. I appealed for additional resources to be made available to the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), and for continued international support for humanitarian and reconstruction efforts and for the electoral process.

In the discussions that followed, there was strong support for the role played by ECOWAS, and a clear understanding of the importance of reinforcing ECOMOG. The meeting was appreciative of the substantial assistance provided to

ECOMOG by donor countries, while noting that there was a need to coordinate efforts so as to maximize their effectiveness. There was also wide support for ongoing emergency operations and for bridging and reintegrating programmes, and the meeting recognized the critical importance of those efforts to the success of the peace process. Participants noted the importance of striking a balance between providing assistance to ex-combatants and to those who had been the victims of the conflict, and there was universal condemnation of the use of child fighters.

A useful and extensive discussion took place on the question of elections. Participants welcomed the recent progress towards establishing a framework for the holding of elections in Liberia, and consensus emerged on a number of issues, including the need to adhere to the 30 May 1997 election date. There were firm pledges of financial and other support from a number of donor countries and from the European Commission. Clear differences emerged, however, with respect to whether refugees should be required to return to Liberia in order to participate in the elections. Substantial repatriation was stressed by nearly all participants as the most effective solution to this problem, and it was noted that a tremendous voluntary repatriation effort would be required on the part of the international community.

The representative of the Chairman of ECOWAS, Chief Tom Ikimi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nigeria, briefed the meeting on the question of sanctions and observed that their availability had had a significant deterrent effect on the parties. The meeting took note of the statement by Mr. Jan Pronk, Minister for Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, that, while the sanctions had not yet been applied, they remained in effect and could be applied against any party in serious violation of the Abuja Agreement.

The Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UNDP Resident Representative in Liberia briefed the meeting on reconstruction and post-election development efforts. My Special Representative, Mr. Anthony Nyakyi, also briefed the meeting on coordination efforts, and it was announced that, in order to further enhance those efforts, the UNDP Resident Representative would also be named as the Director of the Office of the Special Representative.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chairman, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, took stock of what had been achieved. With respect to the three challenges which I had outlined in my opening remarks, he observed that they had been met. First, the high degree of consensus had demonstrated that there was now the necessary political will both inside and outside Liberia for the peace process to succeed. Second, the determination of donors, ECOWAS and the United Nations system to work together was evident, and was a clear signal that the leading actors did now have the "courage to cooperate" in Liberia. Third, donors had made it clear that they were ready to provide the resources needed, and the meeting had sent a very clear message to the parties that if they made progress the international community would respond generously.

Before concluding, the participants expressed their readiness to convene again in support of the Liberian peace process, at whatever level and time I, in consultation with the three organizers, deemed appropriate.

(Signed) Kofi A. ANNAN